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ABSTRACT

Because older job seekers have been shown to exhibit less job search motivation and competence than other groups, a job club program based on learning and self help principles was developed to empower the older job seeker. Of persons (N=48) who requested assistance from a local area agency on aging, half entered the job club program and half were referred to an older worker specialist at a state employment service, i.e., the control group. Several measures were constructed to assess job club effectiveness in terms of the job club's helpfulness to clients and the client's psychological reactions to the program. Subjects were assessed prior to treatment and again at four, eight, and 12 weeks after treatment. Results revealed that for the older worker, the job club was very effective; at the 12-week follow-up, 74% of job club subjects were employed compared to 22% of the control subjects. Although the job club did not produce higher quality placements, it was significantly superior to the control condition on the income variable, and trends in job satisfaction favored the job club. The data suggest that job club subjects succeed because they increase job search knowledge and report increased helping networks. (NRB)

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Empowering the Older Job Seeker: Experimental Evaluation of the Older Worker Job Club[1]

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For presentation at the 34th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontology Society of America, Toronto, Canada, November 11, 1981

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The research which I am about to present can best be described by the label coined by Fairweather and Tornatzky (1977) - Experimental Social Innovation (ESI). ESI involves a deliberate effort to develop a new and hopefully innovative social model, in this case an employment program for older job seekers, and a simultaneous effort to evaluate the utility of that social model or program. The ESI approach is premised on the desirability of scientifically establishing the effectiveness on a social program before widespread adoption of that program is fostered. I suspect this notion will gain a lot of support as we try to squeeze more and more services out of fewer and fewer dollars with the advent of Reagonomics.

Given the thrust of this paper session and the nature of the papers you have heard (or are about to hear) I am going to assume that you are convinced (or soon will be convinced) of the prevalance of and seriousness of unemployment among older workers and retirees. In point of fact, a vast number of older individuals would like to work but are currently unable to secure employment (State Journal, 1979; Kreps, 1966). In my opinion, the urgent issue is not how to foster increased interest in employment by older adults, it is instead how can we reduce unemployment among older individuals already predisposed to the employment option.

Although structural unemployment, and discriminatory forces are probably the most significant barriers to increased employment by old people, other forces also contribute and may be more amenable to remediation at the local level. In the case at hand, my literature review suggested that poor job search performance might be just such a force. Specifically, research indicated that older job seekers tended to exhibit less job search motivation and job search competence than other groups (Sheppard & Belitky, 1966). Further, a recently developed program - the job club - had been reported to produce significantly improved employment rates with other hard to place groups, when compared with traditional employment facilitating programs (Azrin et.al., 1975). Based on this information

a decision was made to develop and evaluate a job club program geared to the specific needs of older job seekers.

The Older Worker Job Club was a relatively complex program based on learning and self help principles which was designed to empower the older job seeker. Viewed at a theoretical level the program was premised on the ability of modeling, role playing, social reinforcement, feedback, information, and peer support to produce behavioral, attitudinal, motivational, skill and knowledge changes in participants - resulting in increased job search competence. Viewed at a functional level the program involved bi-weekly task oriented group meetings run by a group leader. During meetings individuals reviewed and set job search goals, received training and job leads, and provided each other with support and encouragement. The intent of the program was to foster effective and persistant job seeking.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the job club model a naturalistic, longitudinal field experiment was established and run under the auspices of the local area agency on aging. Individuals who requested assistance and agreed to participate in the study were randomly assigned to receive either the job club program or a treatment-as-usual control program. Control subjects were referred to an older worker specialist at the local state run employment service. As you can see from Figure 1, each subject was assessed four times. These assessments took place at P a pre-measure which is identified as Week 0, four weeks, eight weeks and 12 weeks after P. Since a single wave of subjects would have been an inadequate sample for analysis, additional waves of subjects also entered the program and experienced the same assessments. The final sample included 48 subjects, 24 Job Club and 24 Control. The experiment took approximately eight months to complete from day 1 to the final assessment of the last wave of subjects.

The assessment instruments used in the study were constructed to provide answers to three major research questions. These questions were: (1) Is the job club program an effective method of increasing employment among the target population? (2) How (through what mechanisms) does the job club help people find employment? (3) What is the individual's psychological reaction to the job search experience and the intervention they receive?

A number of measures and scales were constructed in order to obtain answers to these questions. As you can see from Figure 2, the specific measures were categorized as primary outcome measures, secondary outcome measures, process measures-sources of treatment efficacy and process measures-subjective psychological reaction.

I would now like to discuss some of my findings. In the interst of brevity and clarity I will forego use of complicated repeated measures analysis of variance source tables and present my data graphically. All of the differences I will discuss were highly statistically significant.

Analyses of the primary and secondary outcome measures revealed that the older worker job club was very effective. As you can see from Figure 3, by the 12 week follow-up, 74% of older worker job club subjects were employed compared to only 22% of control subjects. In fact, the job club produced a higher rate of employment after 4 weeks, 39%, than the control program produced after 12 weeks. Regrettably, the job club did not produce higher quality placements although several trends (wage, job satisfaction) favored the job club.

In addition, as you can see from Figure 4, the job club was significantly superior to the control condition on the income variable. After eight weeks the average job club subject had earned $203 during the previous month compared to $19 for controls. Further, as you can also see from Figure 4, job club subjects were working significantly more hours per month, 45 versus 6, than their control counterparts.

Although I don't have enough time to report all of my process findings in great detail, I can quickly tell you that my data suggests that job club subjects succeed because they have increased job search knowledge and report increased helping networks. There was no indication that job club subjects simply engaged in more job seeking than controls.

By way of closing my presentation I would like to draw the following conclusions: (1) There is persuasive evidence to support the efficacy of the job club as a means of enhancing employment among older workers and retirees. (2) The job club seems particularly beneficial since it works by empowering the individual and thus may generalize to future search efforts. (3) The job club is not a panacea because it failed to improve the quality of placements older job seekers obtain, a issue which must be addressed by other interventions if we want to meaningfully address the older worker problem. (4) In spite of this shortcoming, the job club model has a number of advantages which argue for its adoption by local aging programs: it's a proven method for increasing employment and income, it's simple and cost efficient to run and its a form of assistance we can immediately provide to would-be older workers.

Figure 1
Research Design, Measures and Subject Waves by Time*

WAVE	COND.		TIME →						
1	JC	Measure	PX	F1	F2	F3			
		Weeks	01	4	8	12			
	C	Measure	PX	F1	F2	F3			
		Weeks	01	4	8	12			
2	JC	Measure		PX	F1	F2	F3		
		Weeks		01	4	8	12		
	C	Measure		PX	F1	F2	F3		
		Weeks		01	4	8	12		
3	J	Measure			PX	F1	F2	F3	
	C	Weeks			01	4	8	12	
	C	Measure			PX	F1	F2	F3	
		Weeks			01	4	8	12	
4	JC	Measure				PX	F1	F2	F3
		Weeks				01	4	8	12
	C	Measure				PX	F1	F2	F3
		Weeks				01	4	8	12

LEGEND: P=Premeasure; F1=Follow Up 1; F2=Follow Up 2; F3=Follow Up 3; JC=Job Club; C=Control; X=Intervention Begins

*Weeks within each wave are exact; weeks between waves and over entire study are compressed for illustrative purposes.

Figure 2

Measures by Assessment Area and Assessment Waves

Assessment Area / Measure	Assessment Wave I	P	F1	F2	F3
Participant Measures					
Demographic	X	X			
Primary Outcome Measures					
Placement			X	X	X
Employment		X	X	X	X
Income/Hours		X	X	X	
Secondary Outcome Measures					
Placement Descriptors			X	X	X
Job Satisfaction			X	X	
Process Measures-Sources of Treatment Efficacy					
Knowledge		X	X	X	
Job Search Activity/Day		X	X	X	
Job Search Network		X	X	X	
Expectations (a)		X	X	X	
Program Description			X	X	
Job Club: Attendance (b)			X	X	X
Job Club: Co-members named (b)			X	X	
Process Measures-Subjective Psychological Reactions					
RDI-Activity		X	X	X	
RDI-Financial		X	X	X	
RDI-Health		X	X	X	
RDI-People		X	X	X	
Personal Optimism		X	X	X	
Programatic Optimism		X	X	X	
External Optimism		X	X	X	

(a) not asked after permanent job found
(b) asked of Job Club Ss

Figure 3

PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS EMPLOYED OVER TIME

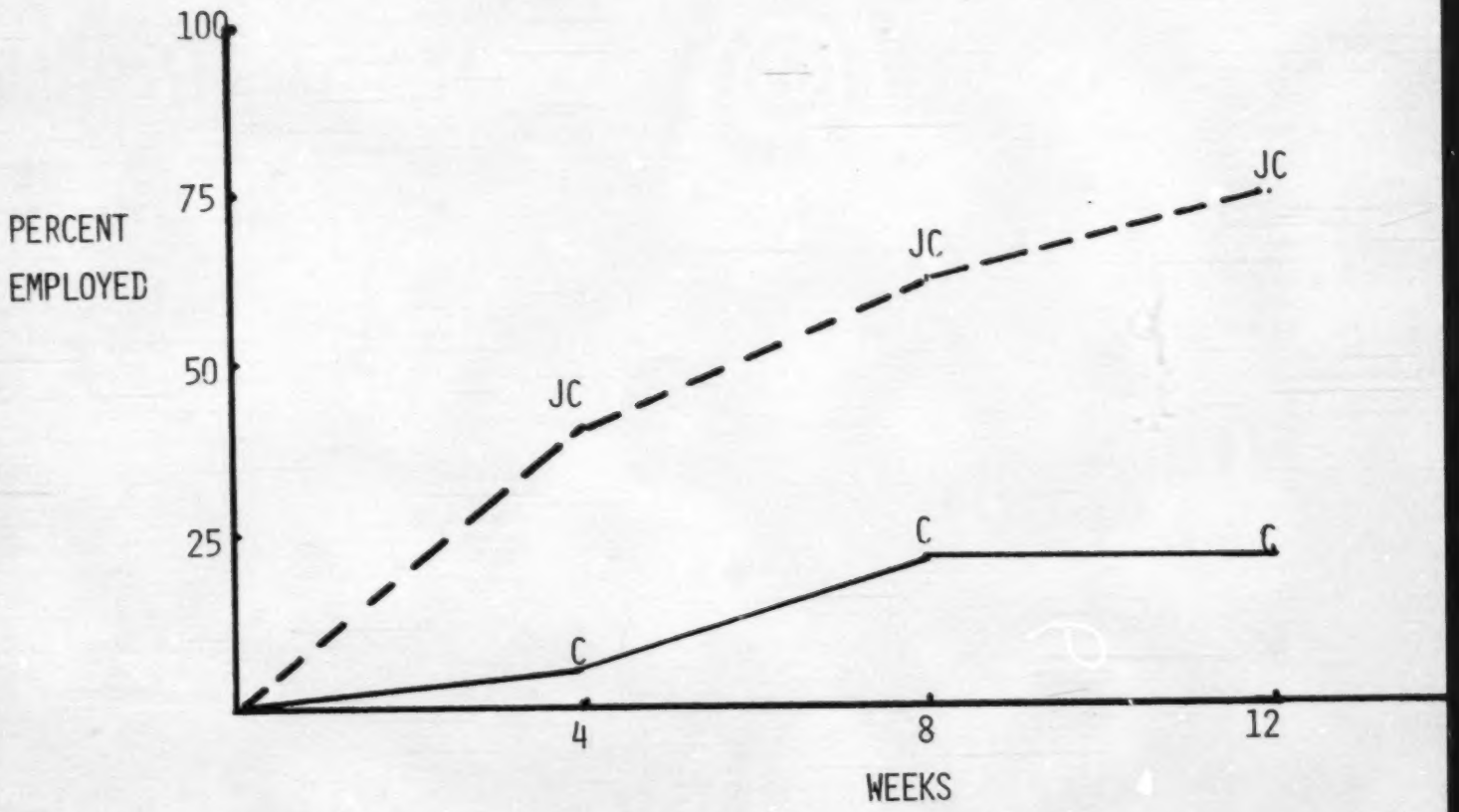
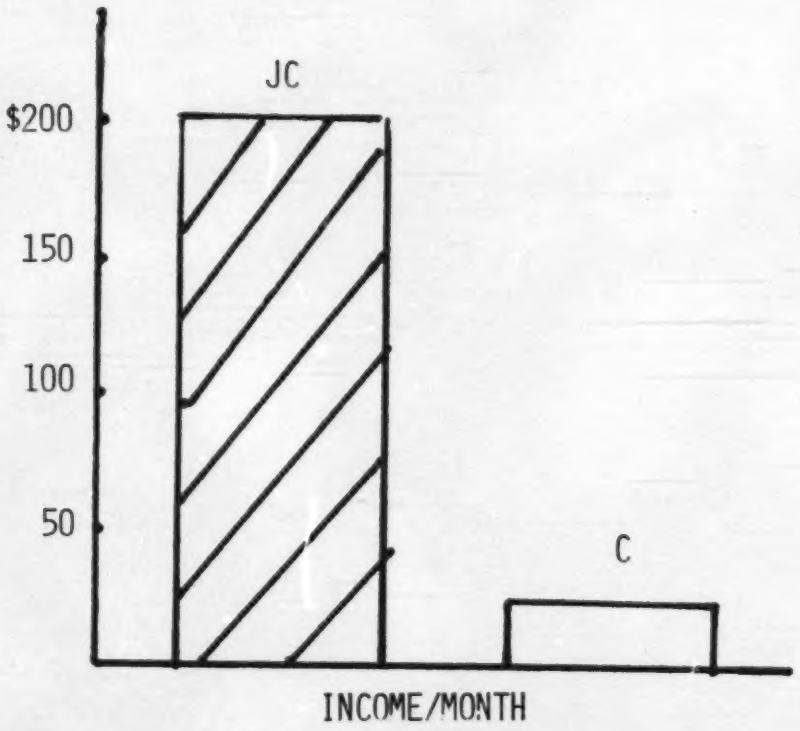
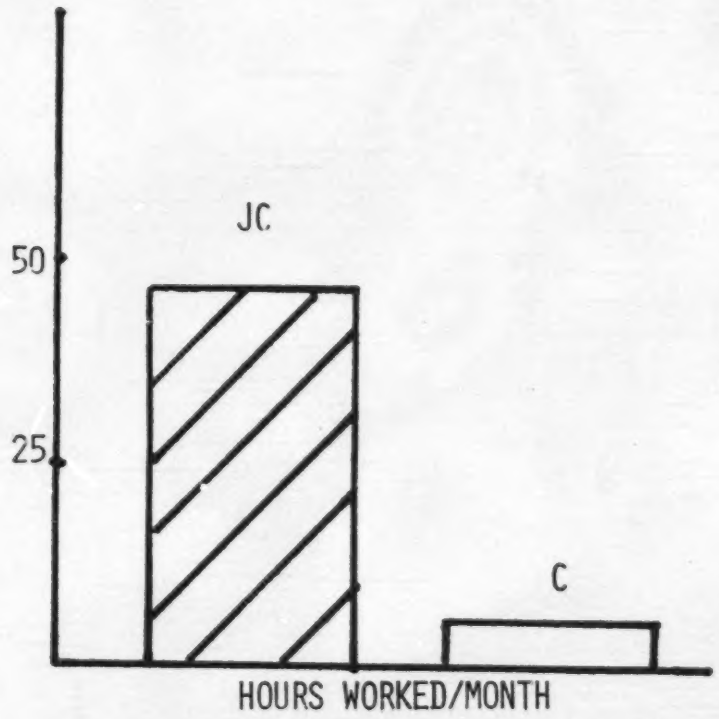


Figure 4

HOURS WORKED AND INCOME PER MONTH AFTER 8 WEEK FOLLOWUP





Footnote:

[1]Gray, D. O. A Job Club for Older Workers and Retirees: An Experimental Evaluation of Outcome and Process. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University, 1980.

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